

IN THE CLAIMS

The following is a complete listing of the claims in this application, reflects any changes currently being made to the claims, and replaces all earlier versions and all earlier listings of the claims.

1. (previously presented) A server on a network, the server operable to:

receive from a first participant via the network a formulation of a problem to be solved;

receive from a plurality of other participants via the network suggested solutions to the problem; and

distribute portions of an award to those participants who contribute suggested solutions to the problem,

wherein the server is configured to distribute a portion of the award, before it has been determined that the problem has been solved, to at least one participant who contributed a suggested solution to the problem.

2. (original) A server according to claim 1, further operable to:

provide tools for use by the first participant for controlling the distribution of the award to the other participants.

3. (original) A server according to claim 1, wherein the distributions of the portions of the award are varied over the course of a development of the suggested solutions for the purpose of guiding the development of a final solution to the problem.

4. (original) A server according to claim 1, further operable to:
 - manage a discussion of the problem and the suggested solutions; and
 - receive and display the discussion in real time.
5. (original) A server according to claim 1, further operable to:
 - receive anonymously the formulation of the problem and the suggested solutions.
6. (original) A server according to claim 1, further operable to:
 - communicatively couple to a database adapted to store the formulation of the problem and suggested solutions.
7. (original) A server according to claim 2 further operable to:
 - store other tools for use by the other participants for controlling the distribution of the portions of the award among themselves.
8. (original) A server according to claim 1, wherein if the first participant has not awarded all of the portions of the award to the other participants within a predetermined time, at least some of the remaining portions of the award are automatically distributed to the other participant who has received within the predetermined time the largest fraction of the award.

9. (original) A server according to claim 1, further operable to:

store tools for use by a presenter for controlling the award to the other participants, wherein the distribution of the portions of the award is varied over the course of a development of the suggested solutions for the purpose of guiding the development of a final solution to the problem.

10. (original) A server according to claim 9, wherein the other participants are viewers of a television broadcast relating to the formulation of the problem and the suggested solutions and the presenter is a television presenter for the television broadcast.

11. (original) A server according to claim 9, where the presenter is selected by the other participants.

12. (original) A server according to claim 1, wherein the other participants are anonymous.

13. (original) A server according to claim 2, the tools further adapted to block the further development of a selected suggested solution.

14. (original) A server according to claim 2, the tools further adapted to allow the first participant to select one of the suggested solutions and control the discussion and distribution of the portions of the award in the context of the selected suggested solution.

15. (original) A server according to claim 1, wherein the formulation of the problem is related to the improvement of company processes.

16. (original) A server according to claim 1 further operable to:

receive a selection of at least one competent authority from the other participants on the basis of suggested solutions delivered by the at least one competent authority via the network; and

facilitate a private problem resolution discussion between a client and the selected at least one competent authority.

17. (original) A server according to claim 16, wherein the client is the first participant.

18. (original) A server according to claim 16 wherein the first participant is an employee of the client.

19. (original) A server according to claim 16, wherein the at least one competent authority is preselected before the formulation of the problem is received by the server.

20. (original) A server according to claim 16, further operable to:

provide a negotiation forum for the at least one competent authority and the client to negotiate a level of award to be awarded to the at least one competent authority for the suggested solution.

21. (original) A server according to claim 4, further operable to thread the discussions.

22. (original) A server according to claim 1, wherein the first participant authorizes the level of the amount of each portion of the award before the other participants send the suggested solutions, thereby finalizing the distribution of the portions of the award.

23. - 54. (cancelled)

55. (previously presented) An apparatus for facilitating problem solving on a network, comprising:

means for transmitting and receiving from a first participant via the network a formulation of a problem to be solved;

means for transmitting and receiving from a plurality of other participants via the network suggested solutions to the problem;

means for distributing portions of an award to those participants who contribute the suggested solutions to the problem; and

means for controlling the distribution of the portions of the award including means for distributing a portion of the award, before it has been determined that the problem has been solved, to at least one participant who contributed a suggested solution to the problem.

56. (original) An apparatus according to claim 55, further comprising:

means for managing a discussion of the problem and the suggested solutions in real time;

means for accepting input of data relating to the discussion; and
means for placing the data onto the network.

57. (original) An apparatus according to claim 55, further comprising:
means for transmitting anonymously onto the network the formulation of the problem and the suggested solutions to the server; and
means for receiving the anonymous formulation of the problem and the suggested solutions from the network.

58. (original) An apparatus according to claim 55, further comprising:
means for storing the formulation of the problem and the suggested solutions.

59. (original) An apparatus according to claim 55, further comprising:
means for storing other tools for use by the other participants for controlling the distribution of the portions of the award among themselves; and
means for displaying and receiving off of the network a selection of the other tools.

60. (original) An apparatus according to claim 55, further comprising:

means for controlling the award to the other participants, wherein the distribution of the portions of the award is varied over the course of a development of the suggested solutions for the purpose of guiding the development of a final solution to the problem; and

means for controlling the award to the other participants by a presenter.

61. (original) An apparatus according to claim 55, further comprising:

means for receiving a selection of at least one competent authority from the other participants on the basis of the suggested solutions delivered by the at least one competent authority via the network;

means for accepting the selection from the other participants; and

means for facilitating a private problem resolution discussion between a client and the selected at least one competent authority.

62. (original) An apparatus according to claim 61, further comprising:

means for providing a negotiation forum for the at least one competent authority and the client to negotiate a level of award to be awarded to the at least one competent authority for the suggested solution; and

means for providing a forum for the negotiation.

63. (original) An apparatus according to claim 56, further comprising:

means for threading the discussions.

64. (original) An apparatus according to claim 55, further comprising:

means for authorizing the level of the amount of each portion of the award before the other participants send onto the network the suggested solutions.

65. (currently amended) A method of facilitating problem solving over a network, comprising the steps of:

transmitting [from] to a server via the network a formulation of a problem from a first participant;

receiving at the server via the network from a plurality of other participants suggested solutions to the problem;

distributing from the server via the network portions of an award to those participants who contribute the suggested solutions to the problem; and

controlling at the server with tools the distribution of the portions of the award to distribute a portion of the award, before it has been determined that the problem has been solved, to at least one participant who contributed a suggested solution to the problem.

66. (original) A method according to claim 65, further comprising the step of:

varying the distributions of the portions of the award over the course of a development of the suggested solutions for the purpose of guiding the development of a final solution to the problem.

67. (original) A method according to claim 65, further comprising the step of:

managing a discussion of the problem and the suggested solutions in real time.

68. (original) A method according to claim 65, wherein
transmitting anonymously onto the network the formulation of the problem
and the suggested solutions to the server; and
receiving the anonymous formulation of the problem and the suggested
solutions from the network.

69. (original) A method according to claim 65, further comprising the step of:
storing the formulation of the problem and the suggested solutions.

70. (original) A method according to claim 65, further comprising the steps of
storing other tools for use by the other participants for controlling the
distribution of the portions of the award among themselves; and
displaying and receiving off of the network selection of the other tools.

71. (original) A method according to claim 65, wherein if the first participant has
not awarded all of the portions of the award to the other participants within a predetermined
time, automatically distributing at least some of the remaining portions of the award are to the
other participant who has received within the predetermined time the largest fraction of the
award.

72. (original) A method according to claim 65, further comprising the steps of:
storing tools for use by a presenter for controlling the award to the other
participants; and
varying over the course of a development of the suggested solutions the
distribution of the portions of the award for the purpose of guiding the development of a final
solution to the problem.

73. (original) A method according to claim 41, further comprising the step of:
selecting the presenter by polling the other participants.

74. (original) A method according to claim 65, further comprising the step of:
blocking the further development of a selected suggested solution using one
of the tools.

75. (original) A method according to claim 65, further comprising the steps of:
selecting one of the suggested solutions; and
controlling the discussion and distribution of the portions of the award in
the context of the selected suggested solution.

76. (original) A method according to claim 65, further comprising the steps of:
transmitting and receiving a selection of at least one competent authority
from the other participants on the basis of the suggested solutions delivered by the at least one
competent authority via the network; and

facilitating a private problem resolution discussion between a client and the selected at least one competent authority.

77. (original) A method according to claim 76, wherein the client is the first participant.

78. (original) A method according to claim 76 wherein the first participant is an employee of the client.

79. (original) A method according to claim 76, further comprising the step of:
preselecting the at least one competent authority before the formulation of
the problem is received by the server.

80. (original) A method according to claim 76, further comprising the step of:
providing a negotiation forum for the at least one competent authority and
the client to negotiate a level of award to be awarded to the at least one competent authority
for the suggested solution.

81. (original) A method according to claim 67, further comprising the step of:
threading the discussions.

82. (original) A method according to claim 65, further comprising the step of:

authorizing the level of the amount of each portion of the award before the other participants send the suggested solutions, thereby finalizing the distribution of the portions of the award.

83. (Previously Presented) Computer code executable by a microprocessor for facilitating problem solving on a network, said code comprising:

code for transmitting and receiving from a first participant via the network a formulation of a problem to be solved;

code for transmitting and receiving from a plurality of other participants via the network suggested solutions to the problem;

code for distributing portions of an award to those participants who contribute the suggested solutions to the problem; and

code for controlling the distribution of the portions of the award to distribute a portion of the award, before it has been determined that the problem has been solved, to at least one participant who contributed a suggested solution to the problem.

84. (original) Computer code according to claim 83, further comprising:

code for managing a discussion of the problem and the suggested solutions in real time;

code for accepting input of data relating to the discussion; and

code for placing the data onto the network.

85. (original) Computer code according to claim 83, further comprising:

code for transmitting anonymously onto the network the formulation of the problem and the suggested solutions to the server; and

code for receiving off of the network the anonymous formulation of the problem and the suggested solutions.

86. (original) Computer code according to claim 83, further comprising:

code for storing the formulation of the problem and the suggested solutions.

87. (original) Computer code according to claim 83, further comprising:

code for storing other tools for use by the other participants for controlling the distribution of the portions of the award among themselves; and
code for displaying and receiving off of the network selection of the other tools.

88. (original) Computer code according to claim 83, further comprising:

code for controlling the award to the other participants, wherein the distribution of the portions of the award is varied over the course of a development of the suggested solutions for the purpose of guiding the development of a final solution to the problem; and

code for controlling the award to the other participants by a presenter.

89. (original) Computer code according to claim 83, further comprising:

code for receiving a selection of at least one competent authority from the other participants on the basis of the suggested solutions delivered by the at least one competent authority via the network;

code for accepting the selection from the other participants; and

code for facilitating a private problem resolution discussion between a client and the selected at least one competent authority.

90. (original) Computer code according to claim 89 further comprising:

code for providing a negotiation forum for the at least one competent authority and the client to negotiate a level of award to be awarded to the at least one competent authority for the suggested solution; and

code for providing a forum for the negotiation.

91. (original) Computer code according to claim 84, further comprising:

code for threading the discussions.

92. (original) Computer code according to claim 83, further comprising:

code for storing the formulation of the problem and the suggested solutions.

93. (original) A server according to claim 6, further operable to:

receive from at least one visitor a quality assessment of the suggested solutions.

94. (original) A server according to claim 6, further operable to:

determine a quality assessment based on the portions of the award received
for the respective suggested solutions.

95. (original) A terminal according to claim 23, further operable:

to place on the network from at least one visitor a quality assessment of the
suggested solutions.

96. (original) A system according to claim 33, further operable to receive from at
least one visitor a quality assessment of the suggested solutions.

97. (original) A system according to claim 33, further operable to:

determine a quality assessment based on the portions of the award received
for the respective suggested solutions.

98. (original) An apparatus according to claim 55, further comprising:

means for receiving from at least one visitor a quality assessment of the
suggested solutions.

99. (original) An apparatus according to claim 55, further operable to:

means for determining a quality assessment based on the portions of the
award received for the respective suggested solutions.

100. (original) A method according to claim 65, further comprising the step of:
receiving from at least one visitor a quality assessment of the suggested
solutions.

101. (original) A method according to claim 65, further comprising the step of:
determining a quality assessment based on the portions of the award
received for the respective suggested solutions.

102. (original) Computer code according to claim 83, further comprising:
code for receiving from at least one visitor a quality assessment of the
suggested solutions.

103. (original) Computer code according to claim 83, further comprising:
code for determining a quality assessment based on the portions of the
award received for the respective suggested solutions.